

# **Texts as Living Objects:**

## **Reconsidering *Dhayls* as a Means for the Study of Authorship and Knowledge Transmission in the Manuscript Age**

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The past two decades have seen an unprecedented revival in the study of manuscripts in Oriental languages like Arabic, Persian, and Turkish. With the steady progress of cataloguing and digitising collections in Europe, North America, and the Middle East, manuscript copies of works which had been previously either unknown or inaccessible to scholars have come to light. As discussed at the conference *Authorship and Textual Transmission in the Manuscript Age* (Leipzig 2021), which focused on the contextualisation of ideological variants in Persian texts from the 11th to 19th centuries, the processes of textual transmission in extant copies and the variants found therein lead us to reconsider our understanding of the production, circulation, and reception of texts, and furthermore, the notion of knowledge transfer in the pre-modern Islamic context as a whole. This reassessment has the potential to significantly enrich our view of authorship and copying practices in the “manuscript age”, which in the Middle East only ended in the early nineteenth century with the broader accessibility of the printing press.

To further expand on the new perspectives that emerged during the last conference, we now turn to the question of *dhayl* (in Arabic, or *zayl/zeyl* in Persian/Turkish), i.e. texts defined as “supplements in the sense of continuing a specific work in time” (Hirschler 2013). Some of these are well-known, such as the various continuations of al-Ṭabarī’s *Ta’rīkh al-Rusul wa-l-Mulūk wa-l-Khulafā’* produced from the 10th to 13th centuries. However, there is a rich corpus of texts identified as *dhayls* or by other terms such as the Arabic *ṣila* or *takmila* that have received little to no scholarly attention. These materials can give us important insights into the question of the completeness of works, the concept of authorship and originality, or the stability of knowledge over time and the updating of knowledge traditions.

In this framework, the conference aims to bring together scholars from various fields, working on Arabic, Persian, and Turkish texts. In particular, contributions are expected to focus on questions such as: Why were *dhayls* produced? Which agents were involved in the production, transmission, and reception of these amendments? What impact does the phenomenon of *dhayl* (or similar notions) have on our understanding of the transmission of knowledge during the manuscript age? And, more generally, what can *dhayls* tell us about authorship as a dynamic and collective process, and the status of texts as living objects in pre-modern times?

### **Application Procedure**

Proposals including an abstract (max. 400 words) and a short biography (max. 200 words) may be sent as one pdf file to both Dr. Sacha Alsancakli (Inalco/CeRMI, [sacha.alsancakli@inalco.fr](mailto:sacha.alsancakli@inalco.fr)) and Jun.-Prof. Dr. Philip Bockholt (WWU Münster, [pbockhol@uni-muenster.de](mailto:pbockhol@uni-muenster.de)) by **31 October 2022**.

The conference will be held in English. Travel and accommodation expenses will be covered.

